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Pleading Prestige Against Purge

Even now—after the eleventh hour; at a few minutes before twelve—there comes, from the outgoing Administration forces in Washington, a renewal of protest against further disloyalty investigations. Why? It is amazing: the protesters aver that these public inquiries "injure U. S. prestige abroad."

Some persons still of considerable position say so. Some said it at the start. Some said it during the recent campaign. All employ such emphasis, or repetition as to cast doubts, not upon their motives, nor yet upon the testimony (pro or con), but upon their own critical qualifications.

Precisely what, according to the diplomatic dictionary, is "prestige?"

Just where abroad have we injured it, or just where may we injure it, through these investigations?

And why?

Ex-Secretary Hull could be excused for his opinion. An ailing man, who never recovered from his treatment received at the hands of Franklin Roosevelt, and who, while in office, believed that all the old bottles of foreign-policy could safely be filled by the new wine of reciprocal trade-agreements.

Ex-Secretary Marshall could be excused. Bred a soldier, and grievously aware of failure in his pre-secretarial diplomatic mission to China—he accepted the State portfolio reluctantly, perhaps moved by a deep sense of gratitude, as well as of duty, to his commander-in-chief, Captain Harry. General Marshall has ever since, with one day's exception, remained a disappointed and bewildered gentleman.

But surely, by now, statesman Harry ought to know better, or know enough to seek advice from those who do know better. He was a wartime Senator; later, he bossed our Potsdam adventure—wherein prestige (and much more) was indeed surrendered. Why does he believe that disloyalty investigations injure our prestige at the present juncture?

In diplomatic language, to say that a country possesses prestige is to say that the country possesses the requisite military power, and the requisite Governmental determination for probable enforcement of its foreign-policies. So, when Chief Executive Truman contends that the U. S. will

investigation of possibly treasonable actions with the Government, C. E. Truman diplomatically speaking, contends:

(1) That our ostensible friends abroad will lose their faith in us as protectors.

(2) And that our potential enemies abroad will, therefore, draw nearer to the point of waging open war upon us.

Yet:

Those foreign friends are the so-called "democratic" countries of Western Europe. We have hired their friendship, by the Marshall Plan. Is Mr. Truman saying, in a voice perfectly audible, across the Atlantic, that we have bought pigs in pokes? That these countries will desert us as soon as they have got every cent we can give them?

Why should Britain and France be shocked by any revelations our investigators make? Britain had titled traitors as long ago as World War I; in France, highly placed traitors have been 50-centimes a dozen since 1869—and both Britain and France have unmasked some of their worst offenders in public.

Our "foreign enemies" are Russia and her creatures. If, as Central Intelligence Agency Chief Bedell Smith affirms, there are Soviet spies in our Government, is it to be supposed that Russia does not already know more about them than our investigators can conceivably discover?

Naive as Mr. Truman has ever been in foreign-affairs, it is unimaginable that he should really believe the exposure of our traitors will lessen any Soviet dread of us: Soviet Russia herself invented the Purge—the Purge Wholesale and Public. The more thorough and public our investigations, the more the Soviets will fear and respect us—for, in the opinion of Stalin's Kremlin, the public, wholesale and frequent Purge is the sign-manual of strength.

"Prestige!" It is a word of French manufacture, from the Latin. Originally, it signified "trickery"—doubtless Mr. Truman still thinks it signifies "illusions." In non-diplomatic speech, it implies "charm"—doubtless our clothes-conscious President thinks it entails something bought across the counter, or purchased in the humid atmosphere of an international beauty-parlor.